

**Amendments to the Claims**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1 (previously presented): A steering wheel comprising:

- a center portion;
- an outer rim encircling the center portion;
- an airbag cover positioned on the center portion capable of being depressed from a normal position to a compressed position;
- an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim, the steering wheel being constructed such that there is no gap at an interface between the airbag cover and the intermediate portion when the airbag cover is in the normal position, wherein when the airbag cover is moved from the normal position to a compressed position a gap is produced at the interface between the airbag cover and the intermediate portion.

Claim 2 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the intermediate portion comprises one or more functional features.

Claim 3 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the intermediate portion comprises one or more decorative features.

Claim 4 (previously presented): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the steering wheel further comprises an upper housing that is capable of being depressed from the normal position to the compressed position.

Claim 5 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 4 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that there is no gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion when the upper housing is in the normal position.

Claims 6-7 (canceled)

Claim 8 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 4 wherein the upper housing may be depressed from the normal position to the compressed position by applying a force to the cover.

Claim 9 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 8 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that if the force is removed, the upper housing will move from the compressed position into the normal position.

Claim 10 (previously presented): A steering wheel as in claim 4 further comprising a horn assembly configured such that depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position actuates the horn assembly.

Claim 11 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 10 wherein the horn assembly includes one or more springs.

Claim 12 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 11 wherein the one or more springs function to move the upper housing from the compressed position to the normal position.

Claim 13 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the intermediate portion includes an overhanging portion.

Claim 14-15 (canceled)

Claim 16 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 further comprising a lower housing.

Claim 17 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 16 wherein the intermediate portion is mounted to the lower housing.

Claim 18 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 further comprising an airbag and an inflator.

Claim 19 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the center portion comprises a casting.

Claim 20 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the center portion includes a shell.

Claim 21 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 further comprising one or more retention hangers that are designed to engage a retaining wire.

Claims 22-26 (canceled)

Claim 27 (currently amended): A steering wheel ~~as in claim 25~~ comprising:

a center portion;  
an outer rim encircling the center portion;  
an airbag cover positioned on the center portion; and  
an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim, the intermediate portion comprising an overhanging portion constructed to overlap the airbag cover such that there is no gap at the interface between the airbag cover and the intermediate portion when the airbag cover is in a normal position, wherein the steering wheel further comprises an upper housing that is capable of being depressed from the normal position to a compressed position, wherein depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position produces a gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

Claims 28-33 (canceled)

Claim 34 (currently amended): A steering wheel ~~as in claim 33~~ comprising:

a center portion;  
an outer rim encircling the center portion;  
an airbag cover positioned on the center portion, the cover comprising a shingle; and  
an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim, the  
intermediate portion attached to the shingle such that there is no gap at the interface between the  
cover and the intermediate portion, wherein the cover comprises a flex point designed to allow  
the cover to flex when the cover moves between a normal position and a compressed position.

Claims 35-38 (canceled)

Claim 39 (currently amended): A steering wheel ~~as in claim 37~~ comprising:

a center portion;  
an outer rim encircling the center portion;  
an airbag cover positioned on the center portion, the cover comprising a shingle; and  
an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim, the  
intermediate portion attached to the shingle such that there is no gap at the interface between the  
cover and the intermediate portion, wherein the steering wheel further comprises an upper  
housing that is capable of being depressed from a normal position to a compressed position,  
wherein depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position does  
not produce a gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

Claims 40-49 (canceled)

Claim 50 (currently amended): An intermediate portion ~~as in claim 48~~ designed to be positioned  
on a steering wheel between a center portion and an outer rim, the intermediate portion being  
attached to a shingle constructed such that there is no gap between the intermediate portion and

an airbag cover, wherein the cover comprises a flex point designed to allow the cover to flex when the cover moves between a normal position and a compressed position.

Claim 51 (previously presented): A steering wheel as in claim 13 wherein the overhanging portion is constructed to limit the outward movement of the airbag cover.

Claims 52-54 (canceled)